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ABSTRACT

A guide for community leaders, extension staff, and community or rural development practitioners outlines the evolution of a regional training model for community-based problem solving in rural areas experiencing economic decline. The paper discusses the model's underlying concepts and implementation process and includes descriptions of four workshops held in the western United States. It describes training methods and cites examples of participants in Montana, New Mexico, and Washington who applied the process to local situations, and speculates about further applications. Goals for workshop participants representing 29 communities included becoming more knowledgeable about fiscal, social, economic, and demographic consequences of decline, resources available to help cope with decline, processes of informing and involving people at home, and strategies for economic and social recovery. Aspects of workshop development included multidisciplinary approach, needs assessment and action planning, impact assessment, management and mitigation framework, case study, and action planning process. Success of the training model is attributed to the synergism of the team approach, the model's transferability and adaptability, the multiplier effect potential, and trainer-team followup. (LFL)

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hard times
COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION

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A team training model: A regional approach to changing economic conditions

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Since the late 1970's many U.S. communities have experienced economic decline. For some, this has been a vivid contrast to the problems and opportunities associated with previous decades of rapid growth and expansion. For others, the slowdown has only compounded the continuing frustrations of long-term stagnation. Rural communities have been particularly vulnerable to the impacts of economic slowdown, as their already limited resources are subjected to increasing pressure.

Cutbacks in inter-governmental revenues have precipitated reductions in public services. In some cases this has improved efficiency, but in many instances the adverse economic circumstances are taking an increasing toll on management and service personnel, budget surpluses, and on the quality of services. As the provision of public services shifts to local governments and private organizations, rural communities are finding that they have too few resources to meet established standards and expectations.

Rural leaders and citizens are under considerable pressure to revise their strategies for dealing with hard times. Old tactics no longer seem appropriate. Communities are questioning the value of bringing in major industries, and soft money for bailing out underfunded services and programs is becoming less available. There is a growing awareness that all resources are limited.

The need is apparent. A real opportunity exists for an educational mechanism that can both develop a community-based, problem solving process that will strengthen existing resources, and provide local citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to apply this process to their own situations.

Cooperative Extension and the Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) rose to meet this need, and did so with a considerable amount of success. This institutional partnership provided training to local citizens so they, in turn, could help their own communities cope with the consequences of economic decline.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Hard Times regional training model that was implemented by the Western Rural Development Center in 1983-84. The model has gone through an evolutionary process in which it has been tested and refined several times. To date, indications are that it holds considerable promise for strengthening the abilities of rural leaders to deal with the consequences of economic decline in their own communities. The potential is also apparent for the model to be transferred to other community problems.

This paper is written primarily for community leaders, Extension staff, and community or rural development practitioners. It outlines the evolution of the training model, the underlying concepts on which the model is based, and the process of refinement which the model has undergone. The implementation process is discussed, including three workshops that were held in the western region. Training methods are described and examples are cited of participants who were able to apply the process to local situations. Some early outcomes of the training are cited, along with speculation about further applications.

WREP 94

WRDC
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Background

In 1978-79, the Western Rural Development Center assumed leadership for a series of training workshops on "Coping with Growth." At that time, there were high rates of population growth in many rural communities. Leaders were under considerable stress responding to the range of human and economic impacts. These workshops marked the introduction of a regional training model which has been well received by university researchers and administrators, Extension staff, community participants, and professional organizations.

The "Coping" model has since evolved and is now being applied, with refinements, to a series of western regional workshops on "Hard Times: Communities in Transition." Unlike the first training program, the workshops are only one part of a more extensive educational process. The model is more clearly conceptualized as a problem-solving process that integrates subject matter with a set of skills for initiating action in rural communities.

The need for a regional training effort of this type was recognized by the Western Region Extension Directors, each responsible for Cooperative Extension in a land grant university. They knew about the preceding "Coping with Growth" series, and felt the reverse economic trend in rural communities warranted comparable attention. A recommendation to this effect was made to WRDC and the Western Extension Community Resource Development Committee. In early 1982, a steering committee was charged with the responsibility of designing and implementing a training program for rural communities focused on "coping with decline."

Objectives

In the earliest stages, the planners identified four objectives to guide model development and the implementation process. Participants should become more knowledgeable about:

Fiscal, social, economic, and demographic consequences of decline.

Resources available to help their communities cope with the consequences of decline.

Processes of informing and involving people at home.

Strategies for economic and social recovery.

The objectives describe, to some degree, the trainers' expectations for the entire educational process. However, an understanding of both trainers' and participants' expectations for the workshop provides a clearer picture of everyones' needs.

Participants came from a variety of small rural communities. In most cases they came as a "team" of two to five people, each representing different community interests—Chambers of Commerce, economic development groups, the clergy, school boards, volunteer organizations, county Extension offices, tribal councils, small businesses, social service centers and local governments. Participants expressed some of the following expectations of the workshop.

"To increase awareness of how to handle our own problems."

"To find out how other communities are dealing with similar problems"

"To generate enthusiasm in our community to solve our problems"

"To develop tools to reach community goals."

"To learn what type of information businesses want and need."

"To learn techniques for attracting investment money."

Trainers did not expect to provide solutions to community problems, rather, they expected to increase participants' knowledge of strategies, tools, and available resources. They did expect to provide guidance in tailoring this information to the unique needs of communities. By the conclusion of the workshop, community teams were expected to have developed strategies for their own action.

At the first workshop it quickly became apparent that trainers and participants did not necessarily understand one anothers' expectations. This stimulated an important element of each succeeding workshop, a designated time to identify and discuss mutual expectations. Much of the workshop success is dependent on this activity.

The model

The workshops are designed to give teams a new way of looking at their communities' problems, and to enable participants to develop a simple but workable plan that can be used at home. Participants analyze the existing situation in order to take greater advantage of available resources (human and material), local beliefs, and values. The need to capitalize on existing conditions is emphasized, since it is easy to overlook unique businesses and services, individual skills, cultural beliefs, or treasured local values. The trainers share a common philosophy concerning the value of both economic and noneconomic resources, and about strategies for dealing with community economic stress.

The model is based on four primary concepts which are integrated in a variety of ways throughout the total process: the team; action planning for product attainment; content integration; and model testing and refinement.

The team

The team concept is central to the model, and is applied at two levels, with the multidisciplinary, trainer team drawn from a variety of academic backgrounds, and with the community participant teams, which represent different local interests and responsibilities.

The need for a multidisciplinary team approach was identified at the

onset by the steering committee. The problems that communities face cannot be adequately addressed by a single discipline or specialization. While economic changes and fiscal cutbacks are frequently identified as the most blatant cause of community stress, they also put stress on individuals, families, organizations, businesses, and the community at large. For example, when a business closes, not only are employees laid off, but family and community life is also affected. Unemployment affects not only individuals and families, but also puts pressure on volunteer organizations and crisis centers. Retail sales may suffer simply because there is less money to spend.

Problems cannot always be effectively addressed by outside "experts." Community members are essential to the problem solving team. Although the outside expert and the local citizen have different roles in the training process, their roles are complimentary. One enables the other to contribute more effectively, thereby producing a higher quality product.

There are distinct advantages to a team approach. In itself it suggests that the unit in need of training or change is not any one individual, but the entire group, and the organizations represented. Dyer (1977:24) observes that "everyone who works together needs to learn new, more effective ways of problem solving, planning, decision making, coordination, and dealing with problem situations that arise."

Mixing professional skills and knowledge with those of lay people results in a type of team "synergy" in which more is produced for less. Synergy is the energy that is created by bringing a diverse set of resources together, in an orderly way, to cooperatively solve a complex problem (Harris 1981:18-32).

There is considerable evidence that most complex tasks are completed by individuals working in cooperation better than by those alone or in competition with each other. This is particularly true when group or team members perceive their goals to be interdependent, or positively linked. A cooperative work setting, such as a training workshop, has consistently been found to strengthen work relationships, morale, and productivity. Even if there are perceived differences in power or equality among team members, the relationship is unlikely to prove disruptive if roles are defined in a noncompetitive manner (Tjosvold 1984:743-767).

The trainer team. This is one of the first Extension community development training programs in the west that has given major attention to resolution of both human and economic stress. Trainers were drawn from sociology, demography, geography, economics, anthropology, social psychology, home economics, and business. At every point, this diversity added to the likelihood that a more cooperative and holistic perspective would be applied to problem analysis and resolution.

The concept of teamwork in Extension is not new. Many program planning meetings bring representatives together from various disciplines to pool their efforts in joint problem solving. Statements of national policy have also called for more "task force" or "total problem" oriented teaching teams (Joint USDA-NASULGC Extension Study Committee 1968:42) and "ways ... to involve other disciplines in the support of [the land grant] system's established programs (Joint USDA-NASULGC Committee on the Future of Cooperative Extension 1983:15).

Cosgriffe and Dailey (1969:80-82) identify two additional reasons why interdisciplinary teamwork is a valuable approach to Extension problem solving. One is the need to enhance interpersonal communications across a large and complex organization. The second concerns the political and physical environment in which Extension operates. If programs are to be effective in addressing environmental and institutional goals, programmatic efforts must be more comprehensive. Teamwork in problem solving can make a major contribution in this direction.

The community team. Participants were recruited as a team, and communities sent two to five people, including the Extension agent. Representatives came from such sectors as local government, private business, social services, volunteer organizations, and community institutions. Ethnic, cultural, and special interest groups were also represented.

Teams of business leaders are common in economic development programs, particularly where limited resources require greater participation by volunteers. These teams generally are comprised of individuals with special knowledge in utilities, transportation, construction, and insurance. (Heare 1976:20-25). However, for the purposes of these workshops, the team

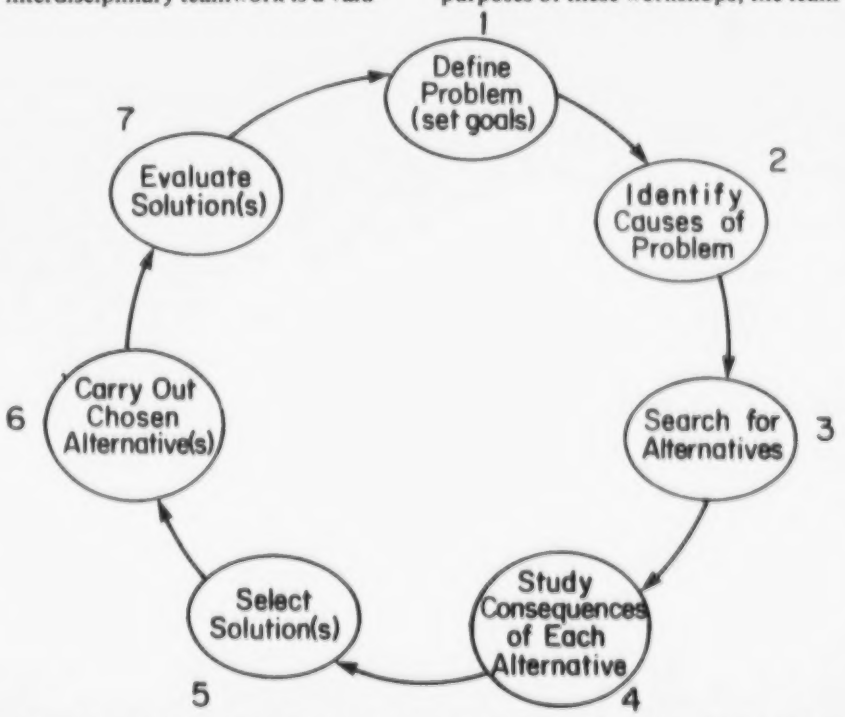

Figure 1. Problem solving model which serves as the basis for the action planning process. One of the workshop goals is to assure that participants will return home with a product—in this case, a plan of action to help their community cope with economic decline.

should represent other sectors of the community in addition to business, since a broad-based effort is required to confront the complex effects of decline.

The community team approach is an effective mechanism to assure a support group for examining local problems, setting goals, and implementing action strategies. Like the trainer team, the community team goes through a continuing process of reaching consensus on priorities, goals, and methods. The team concept seems to be an essential stimulant for moving toward goal attainment. When teams are combined, the resulting synergy is an effective way to generate practical but creative solutions to complex problems.

Action planning for product attainment

The training model incorporates a planning process that is designed, on completion of the workshop, to give participants a product. The product is a plan that identifies strategies for response to particular community situations. Four different activities that reflect steps in the problem solving model are incorporated to move participant teams toward product attainment. (*see Figure 1*).[1]

Preliminary community analysis. Before the workshop, the team identifies major problems of economic decline, the organizations and individuals that are primarily involved and affected, and the preliminary goals for response to the problems. This preworkshop activity focuses on steps one and two of the problem solving model (*Figure 1*). On their own, or with the help of a state Extension specialist, each team goes through an informal needs assessment process (see *Preworkshop activities,* below).

Goal setting. Early workshop activities are designed to help community teams refine their goals through a nominal group process in which participants analyze their goals by identifying the forces that are supporting or blocking them (force field analysis).[2] They also identify the resources that are necessary to achieve their goals, and whether they are available or must be acquired. This step helps refine the goals that were set in the preliminary community analysis (*see steps 1 and 2, Figure 1*).

Organizing at the community level. Midway through the workshop, activities are directed toward helping teams organize for community action and recovery. The focus is on such things as community team building, negotiating, dealing with public apathy, and conflict. Attention is given to group strategies that are based on collaborative approaches, in an attempt to help participants find alternate solutions to the problems they have defined (*see steps 3 and 4, Figure 1*).

Action Planning. By the conclusion of the workshop, community teams have shared ideas and experiences and analyzed the consequences of various strategies for action. By this time, participants have also been exposed to basic subject matter on community economic decline (see *Content integration,* below).

The workshop concludes with each team summarizing its proposed action plan for the entire group (*see step 5, Figure 1*). The plans should be developed on a worksheet, with short and long term action strategies, a proposed time schedule, a list of people to be involved, and the required resources. This wrap-up session depends on questions from peers and trainers, on their observations, and on trainer critiques. At every workshop this "open forum" has been a highlight, where plans are improved in a non-threatening environment, and commitment to action at home is built.

As the teams move through the steps of the planning process, they are moving through the steps illustrated by the problem solving model in Figure 1. Steps six and seven, "carrying out chosen alternatives" and "evaluation of solutions", take place later, in the community.

Content integration

One of the reasons this training model succeeds is that it balances subject matter with skills. Excessive treatment of either one would defeat the purposes of the model.

Early in the workshop, an overview of the content is introduced through discussion of the framework on which the entire concept is based. This framework, referred to as "the impact assessment, management, and mitigation model", provides a way to organize for an impact assessment that emphasizes the use of local resources.[3] The framework also summarizes the results of current research into the psychological, social, demographic, economic, and fiscal impacts of plant closings, and other forces that contribute to economic decline (Howell and Bentley 1985).

This overview is followed by short presentations of subject matter by trainers from disciplines such as economics, business, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and community development. These presentations focus on tools for analysis of various aspects of community decline, e.g. economic, fiscal, demographic, personal, and organizational.

Midway through the workshop, content is again introduced and all teams take part in two intensive sessions. One emphasizes economic recovery strategies, including trade area capture, and the economic potential of new and existing businesses. The other directs attention to strategies for dealing with individual and family stress through, for example, support networks and existing organizations.

There are always a few participants who express little interest in the social or human aspect of economic slowdown. At the onset, some are quite vocal about their disinterest in the social-stress component. Most of the skeptics, however, having gone through the session, express a new awareness of, and sensitivity for, the human problems of community slowdown.

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[1] Over the years, Extension workers and community development practitioners have developed a variety of problem solving models that are applicable to analyzing and solving public and group problems. The models serve as tools for organizing activities that are important to the process. None of the models differ greatly except for the labels used and the numbers of steps identified in the process. Although the elements identified imply a step-by-step procedure, this can be misleading. The actual sequence of activities that takes place depends on individual's or groups' problem solving styles. Comparable models have been developed and applied in business and industry to improve organizational decision-making and development. See for example: National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, *Community Development Concepts, Curriculum Training Needs,* (February 1975):24; and Bennett, *Reflections on Community Development Education,* (August 1973):39-53.

[2] See Sharpe, *Setting Group Goals.* This brief publication draws on the work of several well-recognized authors. It includes helpful material on why and how to set group goals. Techniques discussed include brainstorming, nominal group technique, and force field analysis.

[3] See Howell and Bentley, *Assessing, managing, and mitigating the impacts of economic decline: A community perspective,* WREP 91. (June 1986) Western Rural Development Center.

Some of the workshop evaluation comments support this:

"[Individual and Family] stress is not an area that I have considered in Economic Development in the past. I will in the future."

"[Workshop was] soul-searching—this really opened my mind and increased my ability to cope with a variety of community problems and stress."

Model testing and refinement

The model is tested and refined from Phase 3. (*Figure 2*).

The steering committee (Phase 3). As the steering committee refines the training model, each change is scrutinized. This scrutiny is repeated as resource people are located and participants are recruited. Because the model is further adapted as each phase unfolds, no workshops are identical. Participants and trainers test and evaluate the product in a joint learning process.

Model testing (Phase 4). Several months preceding the first workshop, all resource people and the steering committee gather at a central location to pre-test the materials and methods. For two days the presentations, visual aids, teaching methods, and activities are screened in a peer review process. Once agreement is reached on necessary revisions, a "first string" team is designated for the initial workshop.

Pre-workshop activities (Phase 5). Community teams gather information prior to the workshop and bring a summary of it to registration, where the trainers use it to tailor the workshop to the needs of the participants.

Workshops (Phase 6). Three workshops were conducted in 1984: one in Farmington, New Mexico, one at South Lake Tahoe, California, and one in Butte, Montana. Another workshop took place in Sitka, Alaska in 1985. At each, the content and methods changed in response to participants' evaluations and needs. Even the trainer team was adapted to each specific situation. Because the product is not withheld until it is considered "ready for distribution," but is tested as it evolves, a valuable process takes place between trainer teams and community participant teams.

Each workshop serves as a pretest laboratory for publication materials, and one product of the workshops is a series of publications based on the training model.

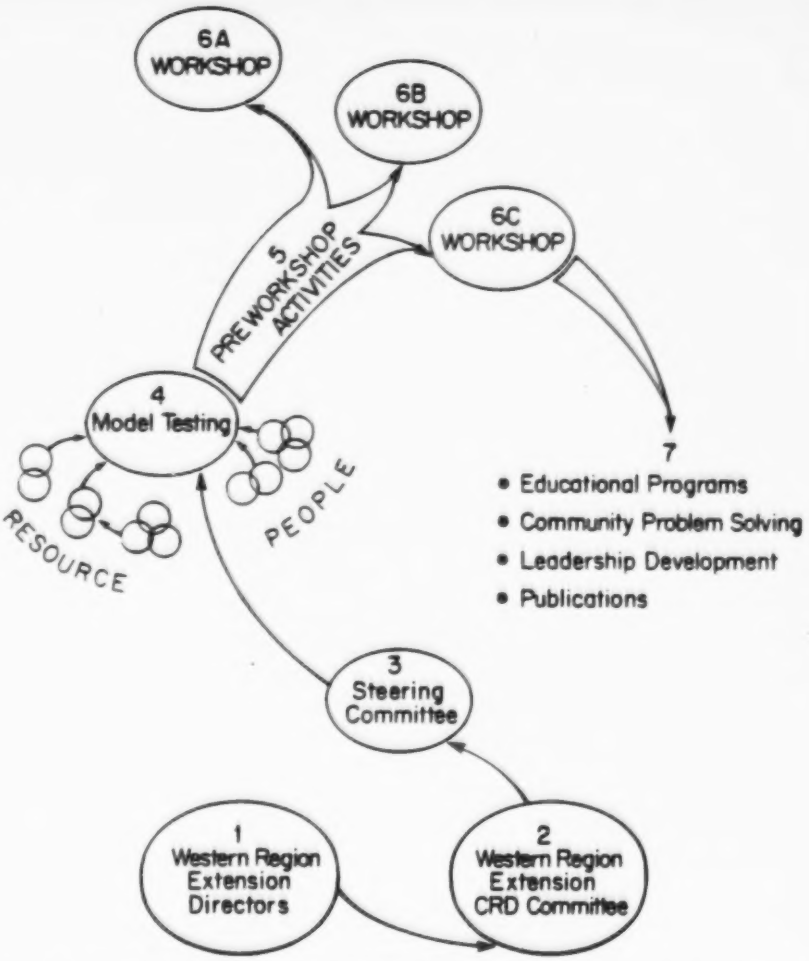

Figure 2. The western region "Hard Times" training model, showing seven phases of implementation.

Implementation

Application of the model to the workshop involves pre-workshop meetings to gather information, a community case study, a conceptual framework, and an action planning process.

Pre-workshop activities

Each team is asked to gather information about its own community's economic decline to help define their situation in preparation for the search for possible solutions. At least one meeting of the community team is encouraged prior to the workshop, with the following objectives.

To assess local viewpoints about the community's economic decline, i.e., Who is involved? Who is impacted?.

To set up preliminary community goals for response to the problems associated with the decline.

To provide an opportunity for the team to develop a written statement that describes the local situation.

To help the team reach tentative agreement on how they might approach the problem, and thereby identify the team's expectations for the workshop.

Before the workshop, instructions and worksheets for advance activities are mailed to each community team. The team is instructed to invite a panel of local, key informants to a meeting. These informants serve as a source of preliminary information about the community's economic decline situation.

Key informants are selected to represent different views of the problem, for example:

- Companies/organizations that have laid workers off.
- Workers who have been laid off, or are threatened by job insecurity.
- Families of unemployed workers (single parent household, two-career households, near-retirement household).

• Employers who may represent new job potential.
• Local government officials and decision makers.
• Social and health service agencies/ organizations.
• Volunteer organizations.

Using information obtained from the panel of key informants, the community team defines the problem and outlines it on a worksheet, as follows:[4]

Background. What happened to result in the current situation? History? Factors underlying or causing the problem?

Primary actors. Who is involved? Who are the major sources of impact? Who could help manage or ease the situation?

Impacted groups. What people, groups or organizations are impacted? How and why are they affected? How great is the impact? Long or short term?

Community goal(s). What would the team like to see happen in the community in response to this situation?

Proposed problem solving method(s). How does the team propose to approach the problem? Proposed actions?

Team's workshop goal(s). What does the team hope to gain from the workshop? Expectations?

This problem statement is to be turned in at workshop registration.

These pre-workshop activities result in a better prepared community team, and they also give valuable information to the trainers as they facilitate the planning process. The problem statement is also useful to the community team in setting goals and planning actions.

The case study

The knowledge that success is possible is essential to a productive workshop on economic decline. With this in mind, a case study video tape was prepared about Roswell, New Mexico. Watching some of the ways a community suffered and overcame its crisis sets the stage for an optimistic attitude. It also illustrates basic community development concepts that participants can apply.

The use of video documentation offers a potential that isn't often used in training programs, but viewing an actual case study provided a common denominator to which all workshop participants and trainers could relate. Every workshop evaluation indicated that the Roswell tape occupied a central role in assuring the success of the model.

Roswell suffered two major economic reversals in the late 1960's and 1970's. First an air base closed, and a few years later one of the town's largest employers, a meat packing plant, closed its doors. Interviews with past and present community members reveal the trauma of economic upheaval, the methods employed to overcome that upheaval, and the results of a successful and continuing community effort.

Participants in Roswell's recovery discovered no easy answers, no simple solutions, and no quick fixes. The turning point took nearly ten years to materialize. One person who was heavily involved in the process said it took two years to develop a master plan for recovery, another three years to put the plan in place, and a total of ten years before results really started to show.

The documentary video tape emphasizes that recovery doesn't always require a lot of money. The essential ingredient in the case of Roswell was a belief in the community's potential, enthusiasm, imagination, courage, and spirit. This kind of spirit doesn't give up easily, and is able to turn problems into assets. For example, many empty houses remained in Roswell after the base closed. Community leaders took a positive attitude toward the problem, recognizing that the "millstone" could become a blessing, and the empty houses became a key element in recovery.

Analysis of the case study reveals five prerequisites to community survival and growth:

1. Realistically evaluate, and capitalize on, community capabilities.
2. Know what the community's basic beliefs and values are, then build on them.
3. Develop a workable plan that treats problems and not symptoms.
4. Use available resources.
5. Community members must have the determination to do the job, and devote volunteer time to seeing the job done.

With these five elements, a community can succeed. If citizens are willing, almost any physical obstacle can be overcome. The greatest limitation in any community is the people.

The conceptual framework

Community problems can be effectively addressed by applying a systematic procedure. In the case of economic decline, a "model" or "framework" exists which outlines a step-by-step plan for analyzing the problem and identifying strategies to resolve it. A conceptual framework was developed for the workshop which provided a community perspective for assessing, managing, and mitigating the impacts of community decline. This framework analyzed the case study, identified real life applications of the concept, and provided the organizing process for the workshop.[5]

This framework gives community teams a tool they can systematically apply to their problems. The model deals with the interrelationships among the components identified in Figure 3, where *outside forces* could be legislation, policies, or other factors determined outside the community. The *source of impact* is the specific facility, plant, resource or economic entity causing the problem. Factors in the *local setting* to take into account include social, economic, demographic, fiscal, cultural, and political characteristics of the affected community.

Expected impacts, or expected changes under existing conditions, must be gauged, so that *impact management and mitigation options* can be explored and alternative policies, programs, and actions can be developed in response to expected impacts. *Actual impacts* are, of course, those changes that actually occur, either as a result of action or of inaction.

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[4] The "key informant panel" or "focus group" builds on the strengths of two different, but complimentary, data collection methods: the key informant method often used by anthropologists, and the group discussion processes business or community organizations sometimes employ. The panel consists of 5-10 people selected because of their knowledge of the subject, and their ability and willingness to discuss the topic.

The purpose of the panel is to focus on, and provide information about, the local economic problem. Panel members should represent different community perspectives and interests. The discussion leader comes to the meeting with 5-8 focus questions to guide (but not structure) the panel's deliberation, for example:

- What are the major problems you feel citizens are experiencing as a result of...(the mine closure, the plant layoff, the federal revenue termination)...?
- What primary organizations or groups seem to be behind the problem?
- What kinds of citizens, families, organizations or institutions seem to be most affected?
- What should our community do to respond to these problems?

After panel members express their viewpoints and others have had a chance to elaborate, the information is summarized by the team and used to develop a problem statement for the workshop.

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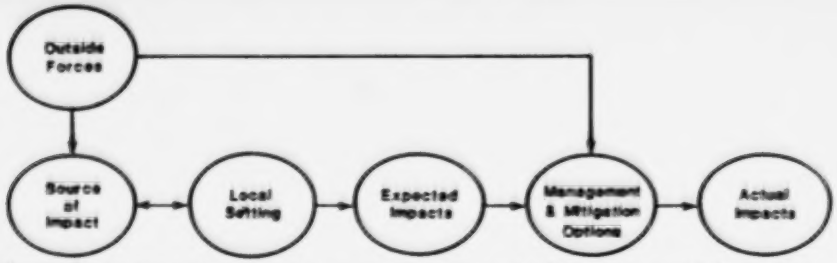

Figure 3. An impact assessment, management, and mitigation model derived from an earlier model used for rapid growth impact assessment and management. The model distinguishes between expected and actual impacts, and provides an analytical and management framework for community leaders.

The action planning process

This process was designed to produce strategies for action by the end of the workshop. Community teams have been taken through pre-workshop activities, goal-setting exercises, and organizing approaches. At each step, the teams have opportunities to address their own problems, and to receive input from trainers and participants. Two subject matter sessions during the workshop give specific information on strategies for dealing with economic recovery and social stress.

Near the workshop conclusion, community teams prepare their tentative action strategies for presentation to the entire group. This motivates the teams to develop logical strategies and results in a strong commitment to follow through with the plans.

Twenty-nine communities were represented at the first three workshops, and nine at the Alaska workshop. Most of these communities developed viable action plans, representing a wide range of goals and strategies. For example, some of the goals around which action strategies were developed include:

- Update (or develop) an economic development plan
- Inventory community organization resources
- Establish agreement among community factions
- Enhance community involvement and community pride
- Find a new occupant for vacant school building
- Develop and organize a charter fleet
- Promote bottom fish industry

The following three examples illustrate the type of plans presented. The formats are as outlined by the presenting team. All plans typically included goals, actions, dates, person(s) responsible, and resources needed.

Tillamook County, Oregon Action Plan

Short Term Goal: Update the Economic Development Plan

Short Term Action	Time Frame	Who	Information Resources
1. Expand membership in Economic Development Team (improve network)	June 30	County Commissioners Existing Economic Dev. Committee	Who are the people we need to involve?
2. Hold organizational meeting of expanded Econ. Dev. Comm.	Aug. 1	Present Economic Dev. Committee	What will the new members be expected to do?
3. Develop preliminary needs and goals for the new committee	July 15	Present committee and staff	What do we need for updating the plan? Contracts for members.
4. Write update of Economic Dev. Plan	Nov. 1	New Economic Dev. Team	Committee meetings and report.

Homer, Alaska Action Plan

Goal: Promote Bottom Fish Industry

Action Strategies	Timing	Who	Resource and Information Needs
1. Meeting of interested parties	1 month	Industry, fishermen, major leaders	Names of local people that have interest
2. Appoint task force with cross section	Ongoing	Staff	
A. Survey industry	3 months	Local fishermen, outside companies	
B. Survey markets	3 months	Consultants	Quality, quantity
C. Survey transportation needs & availability	3 months		Methods
3. Test resources	3 months	Alaska Fish/Game	
4. Educate interested parties	3 months		Sitka Fisheries/ Experience
5. Implement public/ private partnership	1 year	Task force	Fish dock Seward Fish Fishermen

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Bloomfield, New Mexico Action Plan

Goal: Form a core leadership for the "Bloomfield 1990" committee

Action: Organize informational meeting and seminar March 27, 1984.

Method: Bring statistics on current situation and possible solutions.

Who will be involved: This committee (the community team), Extension Specialist, other community leaders.

Information/resources needed: Statistics, video tape of Roswell, resource people.

Community outcomes

Follow-up in over one-third of the participating communities reveals a promising level of commitment to the plans and strategies that were initiated during the workshops. In New Mexico, this has been particularly true since an Extension specialist has given continuous support to the teams that attended the first workshop in Farmington. In other states, such as Washington, county Extension agents have provided major encouragement and leadership. A few examples of community results are described below.

New Mexico

Following a workshop in Farmington, the community team from Bloomfield developed an agenda, made presentations, and acted as workshop facilitators. Although the state economic development specialist was invited to participate, team members felt that the skills and knowledge they acquired at Farmington had prepared them for active leadership and involvement in their own economic development activities. The community has initiated and successfully completed a clean-up campaign, and newly designed and installed information signs are beginning to attract passing tourists.

Although only one person from Gallup attended the Farmington workshop, that individual initiated several activities. The state economic development specialist led workshops that identified first-year economic goals and strategies. The economic issue the community decided to initially address is public intoxication in the downtown business district. In addition, the city and county are funding a position to provide leadership to the areas's economic development plan. This emerging "second-generation" awareness of social issues in association with economic development is an indicator of the changes that occur as a result of the workshop.

A small business education project has been stimulated in Raton. The project will begin with a workshop on "community assessment and diagnosis," followed by a series of specialized strategy workshops for small business people on topics such as "getting started in business," "marketing for increased sales," "getting good help and working with people," and "making a computer pay for itself."

Washington

Three different county teams from Washington participated in the Tahoe workshop. In each case, the workshop stimulated an active economic development council or task force. Skamania County's team initiated a planning grant proposal which, when funded and combined with in-kind contributions, provided the county with almost $35,000 for economic development planning. They have also conducted a random survey of 10% of the county's registered voters. The questionnaire, which achieved an 82% return, looked at citizens' shopping practices, industry preferences, public values, community goals, and employment preferences. The survey was designed and conducted by community volunteers, with the team assuming primary responsibility. A series of local workshops are planned to communicate survey results.

The Ferry County team left the workshop feeling a need to broaden the county's economic base. The team made contacts with a wide range of community decision makers and leaders, inviting them to participate in an intensive economic development workshop. With the help of several state Extension specialists and the county agent, an action plan was developed which identified downtown improvement, tourism development, cottage industry expansion, and senior citizen/retirement housing as priorities. The plan also incorporated two previously identified development priorities, county rehabilitation, and community recreation. Responding to a questionnaire, twenty people committed themselves to work on standing committees, and were trained by the team using techniques learned at the Butte workshop.

In analyzing the early success of the Ferry County team's activities, the county Extension agent credits local people with assuming major responsibilty. Their strategy benefited from broadening the base of community involvement, good public communication, and opening up participation activities to anyone interested. Careful attention was given to the integration of existing development activities.

The Wahkiakum County team took advantage of what they learned at the workshop and proposed several activities to expand current development efforts. The team suggested a focus on retail trade analysis, and a county-wide sample survey to assess the public's views on economic development issues. Cooperative Extension and an outside consultant provided technical assistance, but community volunteers assumed major responsibility for survey design and implementation. Results are to be incorporated into the economic development plan and will be available to community groups and businesses who can take advantage of the information.

Montana

A team that was unable to participate in the Butte workshop found a way to take advantage of workshop resources. The state community development specialist conducted a five-hour intensive meeting with the Thompson Falls team, which consisted of five to six business people and a local employment service representative. This meeting resulted in a trade-area analysis for Thompson Falls, and a set of downtown development designs by Montana State University students.

Conclusions

It has been the purpose of this paper to describe a team training model that the western region has found highly successful in helping rural citizens deal with the problems of community decline. As efforts are made to follow the progress of communities that participated in this program, there is increasing documentation that the model works, and that it shows considerable promise for even wider application. We credit this success to five factors:

- the synergism of the team approach
- the model's transferability
- the model's adaptability
- the multiplier effect potential
- trainer-team follow-up

Team synergism

Regardless of the type of community, or the source or degree of economic slowdown, at least 38 communities from 10 western states found both the content that was presented and the problem solving process applicable to their situations. Emphasis of the team concept with both trainers and participants stimulates a synergistic training mode which produces community action. The team method also makes it possible to apply an interdisciplinary perspective to problem-solving.

Prior to the development of this model, few educational programs in the west have been able to respond to the closely related social and economic aspects of economic decline.

Transferability

One of the strengths of the model is its potential transferability to other regions of the nation, to other community difficulties, or to different organizational problems. The team concept works well with any problem that has multiple dimensions, or that impacts a diverse population, because it involves a broad range of expertise. The action planning strategy is also applicable to other problems, and to achieving a usable product in a relatively short period of time. It makes both economic and social sense.

Adaptability

Another of the model's attributes is that it can expand or condense to accommodate a variety of circumstances. In Alaska, a two-day weekend session was tailored to meet the needs of business people and public officials who had to travel great distances to attend. The training model also proved versatile enough to accommodate more involvement from local resource people. There is a sufficient balance of subject matter and planning techniques to allow any participant or trainer to extend appropriate elements to other interested groups, even teams that were unable to participate in the workshop.

Multiplier effect

This well-tested Extension method of training local leaders, who in turn train other citizen groups, has proven to be an effective means of spreading educational information. In more than one instance, as a result of training a few community representatives, we observe the original participants acting as trainers for other groups. This may be partly attributable to peer support, but it is also due to the teams' "hands on" participation in an action planning process that has focused on real problems from their own communities. The availability of a "training material package" has also made the task more manageable at the community level.

Trainer follow-up

Without the potential for continuous support from an Extension specialist or field practitioner it is doubtful that community teams can sustain the workshop momentum for long. Where teams have had continuing contact with an Extension resource person, or some other strong community leader, there is evidence of greater local accomplishment. In the west, this has sometimes been facilitated through the resources of the Western Rural Development Center. Land grant universities have provided specialist support to team activities. Some teams have drawn heavily on local resource people with strong technical expertise, or enthusiastic public officials who see the value of continued team support.

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